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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 004767

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2017
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SUBJECT: DCM MEETS WITH NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR AZIZ

REF: ISLAMABAD 4761

Classified By: Anne W.Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The DCM met with National Security Advisor Tariq Aziz for a 30-minute one-on-one meeting November 7. During the meeting the DCM conveyed reports that detained human rights lawyer Atizaz Ahsan has no access to family members and may have suffered physical abuse. The DCM reiterated the USG position that GOP should proceed with elections as scheduled and Musharraf should take his uniform off. The DCM discussed media censorship and expressed disappointment that despite assurances otherwise to the DCM two days ago, both domestic and international private channels are off the air. Aziz requested USG assistance engaging Benazir Bhutto to keep her people off the streets in response to the government's actions. The DCM responded that it is clear Bhutto was left with few options. The GOP could allay her mobilization efforts by quickly announcing election dates and having the President resign as Army Chief. Aziz responded that this could happen in the next few days. END SUMMARY.

ELECTION DECLARATION

2.(C) Aziz opened the meeting by stating he expected the DCM to bring a formal message from the USG. The DCM responded by reiterating the formal and consistent message delivered over the past few days, including President Bush's clear statement.

3.(C) Aziz went into a long explanation that a delay in announcing the election date and the date of the President's resignation as Army Chief is due to his hope four of the previous Supreme Court justices will take a new oath of allegiance. He went on to state the four were reasonable men and the GOP thought it was in their best interest to have them join the court. The DCM responded that the GOP made a serious error by not having President Musharraf announce a firm, prompt election date as well as his reaffirmation to remove the uniform by November 15. Each day no announcement is made prolongs the crisis and seriously adds to the international consensus that Pakistan is faltering in its commitment to hold free and fair elections.

4.(C) Aziz was taken aback by the comment and quickly responded the election would be announced in the next few days and the President would soon remove his uniform. When

pressed on the election date, he said it would be some time in early February, claiming the originally scheduled January 15th date could not be achieved.

5.(C) The DCM provided Aziz a candid assessment of the Congressional reaction to GOP's delay. While Aziz took this all on board, it was clear he did not appreciate the potential damage this could have on U.S. assistance to Pakistan.

AMB TO MEET BHUTTO

6.(C) The DCM informed Aziz that AMB Patterson would meet Bhutto later today. In response to Aziz's earlier request for USG intervention with Bhutto to prevent PPP forces from engaging in demonstrations, the DCM said that it was clear Bhutto felt boxed in and said if the GOP wanted her to restrain her people from the streets, GOP would have to announce election dates and President Musharraf would have to resign as Army Chief.

7.(C) At this point, Aziz reiterated elections would be announced in the next three to four days and the President would resign as soon as the four Supreme Court members were added to the Supreme Court some time in the next 10-15 days.

8.(C) The DCM expressed great concern the GOP did not have the luxury of time. The public mood and patience is quickly waning as the government delays the announcement. The DCM also raised the issue that Bhutto's staff were not receiving regular briefings on the progress of the Karachi bombing investigations. We noted the need for better communication from the GOP to Bhutto regarding updates in the

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investigation. Aziz agreed and said he would speak to the proper authorities about the issue.

DETENTION OF ATIZAZ AHSAN

9.(C) The DCM raised the USG's great concern for the welfare of Atizaz Ahsan. The DCM explained there are confirmed reports family members are not allowed to visit him in detention nor is he provided with needed medicines. He further stated he received unconfirmed reports that Ahsan had been physically abused. The DCM noted that Deputy Secretary was contacted by Senator Conrad who said 30 U.S. Senators were signing a letter expressing concern over the imprisonment of Ahsan. Aziz said he would share this with the DG ISI and try to open visitation to family members and diplomatic missions. In addition to protesting Ahsan's detention, the DCM said it was painfully clear GOP had no appreciation of the international uproar Ahsan's arrest had created.

MEDIA CENSORSHIP

10. (C) Aziz feigned ignorance on media censorship and said he would ensure international broadcasters were back on the air shortly. He expected domestic media back on the air once they agreed to the new PEMBRA standards. (COMMENT: He left a clear impression that he was only paying lip service to the DCM concerns. We expect little progress. END COMMENT)

UNDOING THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION OF PROGRESS

11.(C) The DCM raised the issue of excessive force by GOP security officials dealing with demonstrations and arrests. He noted the perception the GOP created by using heavy-handed tactics was undoing the public's perception of progress President Musharraf had made creating an open society and moving towards democracy.
PATTERSON